June 2007

animato!

ASIFA East · The International Animated Film Society

Michael Sporn's Andersen Tales June Screening!

Michael Sporn will present his two newly released DVDs!!

The programs on the discs includes four of Sporn's adaptation of **Hans Christian Andersen** tales, **The Red Shoes**, **The Little Match Girl**, **Nightingale**, and **The Emperor's New Clothes.**

Wednesday, June 20th
School of Visual Arts
5th Floor, Room 502.
Admission is FREE.

See p6 for more details.

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ASIFA East

The International Animated Film Society
Northeast /New York Chapter
A Program of the New York Foundation For The Arts

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ANIMATION BLOCK.COM

animation block party will run from
july 27-30, 2007 all over brooklyn nyc.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT
DAVID B. LEVY

Michael Barrier's The Animated Man: A life of Walt Disney

I've read a handful of biographies on Walt Disney over the years and I can say with certainty that Michael Barrier's new book, The Animated Man: A life of Walt Disney (University of California Press) is the very best. Although the book is laden with quotes pulled from interviews with those who knew and worked with Walt, the anchor of the book is Barrier's research based conclusions. The author pulls much of his best information from official documented studio notes taken from meetings that demonstrate Disney's role in shaping his studio's art.

Here are just some of the books many revelations that just about blew me away.

1. The reality that Oswald The Lucky Rabbit, Disney's pre-Mickey character series, was not a project born of inspiration. In fact, Universal ordered the series by description, asking for a rabbit character named Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. As Barrier tells it, Disney arrived back at his studio with the news that his crew would be switching production from Alice to Oswald. It reminded me of a factory switching product manufacturing based on a new order, which in essense, is what it was.
2. The idea that departure of Ub Iwerks from Disney was actually a plus and a neccessary incident in the development of animation at the Disney studio.
3. The fact that little or nothing in Disney's early pre-Mickey Mouse history shows any evidence that he would become the artist/industry leader that he became. Disney's early works are as crude and filled with short cuts as any other silent era animation producer.
4. Disney features from Cinderella onwards were no longer pre-scored beyond song sequences. For example, in an early feature such as Pinochio, the music that accompanied Jiminy Cricket's dash across the street would be pre scored, in other words, written and recorded before any animation was done. The story artist, sequence director, and lead animator would work with the track and the resulting animation was connected to the sound track in a way that could not be achieved by post scoring the animation. Scoring a film after

the picture is complete is the way live action films are made and that is one of the reasons why all the Disney features from Cinderella through Jungle Book are a far less rich experience.

5. The suggestion that the two Disney feature films that assigned animators to characters the way actors are cast as characters were all the more better because of it. For evidence, seek out Fred Moore's seven dwarf animation and Bill Tytla's animation of Dumbo and his mother.

6. The way Barrier connects how Disney's passions for trains and miniatures paved the way towards his creation of Disneyland. Talk about productive hobbies!

Finally, a key theme of the book is that the animation breakthroughs leading up to and including Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs did not really lead the Disney artists beyond that. In a form of arrested development, key animation innovators such as Tytla, Babbit, Ferguson, and Moore, were all replaced by younger higher-quality draftsman, 9 of which, would become the fabled 9 old men. While the draftsmanship improved under the 9 old men, a life-sucking literalness also crept into the animation. Each of us can decide for themselves if what was gained was worth more than what was lost. But, of course, nothing is really ever lost, just possibly a sleep for a while (Just like Snow White, herself). Pick up this book today! It's your summer read. And, if you just can't get enough Michael Barrier, check out his great Web site: www.michaelbarrier.com. I also highly recommend his terrific commentaries on the the four Warner Brothers cartoon DVD collections.

Michael Barrier's The Animated Man: A life of Walt Disney

Jose Maldonado

Toon Tea

Hello dear readers, welcome to Toon Tea, ASIFA East's "Keeping Tabs" column. Here we will attempt to gather news notes and anecdotal tidbids of what is going on in the land of animation.

On the tale of winning Best In Show at this year's ASIFA East Festival for "Everything Is Going To Be OK" we've discovered that film maker Don Hertzfeldt, while absorbed in production, still is delighted to receive brief correspondence via the Bitter Films MySpace page. So those of you who are eager to congratulate and/or persuade Mr. Hertzfeldt to make an East Coast appearance, and happen to have a myspace profile, hop on to www.myspace.com/bitterfilms and post a little comment.

Tom Sito, also on the West Coast, is working on PBS's first ever primetime animated show. The show centers on 2 mechanics from Boston who have a radio show. He's really basking in the glow of working for a network that's "not top heavy and bureaucratic, and its like that especially because I know Linda [Simensky] actually loves the medium and doesn't stand there asking me 'Do you really draw every frame?'" He joking compared the experience to having worked for many years for luxury cruise lines and now finally has his own little boat to take out to the bay.

Further tidings come from Burbank as Heather Kenyon from Cartoon Network sends warm regards and mentioned that this year's ASFIA East Festival was great and that Cartoon Network was very happy to sponsor the event.

Continuing with West Coast News, here is a word from the wise to any aspiring music video directors; I have an anonymous but well respected friend who was in pre-pro on a animated video for a cover of a famous song that had been released on CD, but unbeknownst to the band and director, those rights did not extend to video and the whole project had to be scrapped. So, he told me for this article, its never too obvious to state the obvious, as its much better to over hear the obvious than have a highly anticipated vision get hampered by loop holes and legalities. So, make sure whatever it is, the rights are with you!

On a political front, a post festival conversation between myself and Candy

Kugel from Buzzco, begged the question, "where have political films gone recently?!" Buzzco's entry this year, "Right", was an observation on the polarization of political, social, and religious groups. Then again, Buzzco (*www.buzzzco.com*) has been one of the few companies that consistently produce politically based films that are more thought provoking rather than just satire. A few years ago, there was a veritable maelstrom of politically charged films by creators spanning from Bob Lyons, Peter Wallach, Ward Sutton, to Ray Kosarin. However, in the recent absence of timely political films, Mark Fiore challenges our social climate with bi-weekly short episodes not limited in subject matter to politicians, but also lovable characters like "Knuckles, the Interrogator", "Snuggly, the Security Bear", and "Buster, the Friendly Nuke" (*www.markfiore.com*).

Meanwhile, Darcy Vorhees (formerly of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Friday), who now resides in Ohio, is teaming with Debra Solomon on her new short personal film as well. Darcy's also making a cameo appearance back in New York from June 16th -21st in conjunction with her website re-launch (*www.darcyv.com*).

For those of you who like to collect art and illustration, Darcy, along with Adrian Barrios, Roy Burdine, Keith Conroy, Jose Velsaco, and many others who worked on Ninja Turtles, are featured in book called "The Talent Behind the Turtles", which is a collection of NON-TMNT sketches, drawings, and illustrations (www.turtletalent.com). In more compilation news, Allan Neuwirth and Glen Hanson, who earlier this year published volume 2 of the Chelsea Boys comic collection, will be releasing Original Signed Artwork of the first black & white strips from the series later this summer. (*www.chelseaboys.com*).

On the local New York front, seems that several new ways for animation people to socialize and collaborate are blossoming. First, Gina Bari, is opening Betty Spaghetti's School of Art and Debauchery; where the fun and young at heart express their creativity (or lack there of). The sessions are designed so that you can draw or paint kooky concepts including scandalous home-wreckers, sexy mimes, and even red hot Firemen! The mission is just to make people have a goof while improving their skills and sharpening their creativity. It even features contests and prizes (including Tequila Shots)! Currently, "Betty Spaghetti" is also taking suggestions for possible locations for sessions and events, so if you know of a bar, cafe or store front that would be great for Betty's classes please contact bari.scully@gmail.com or call 646-208-2501. (*http://bettyspaghettisschool.blogspot.com*)

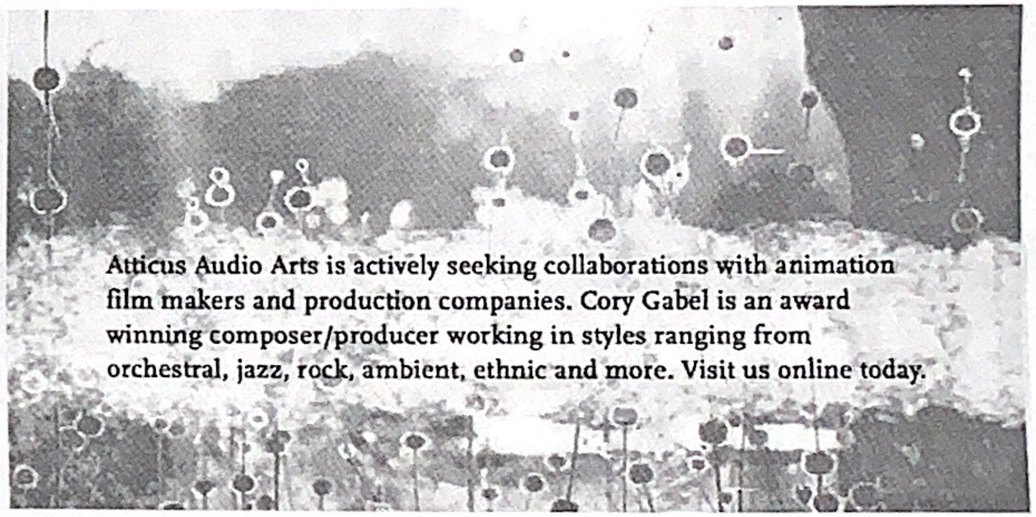
Stieg Retlin, AKA Plasticflesh, continues making all kinds of animation and music and such that'll make you say "LOL WUT?" His current scheme is to grow a receptacle for these miscellaneous outputs and to host similar outputs created by his friends. The name of this webzine thing is "Plasticflesh Presents." We'll see what it that mutates into. Yours truly is currently working on a parody of a well known 80's Saturday morning cartoon along with Mr. Plastic Flesh, and eagerly awaits the kind of awe inspiring effects that Stieg's visions usually have on its audience. If anyone is interested in more details about the concept, or even participating, contact *stieg@plasticflesh.com*. Otherwise he watches speed-runs of video games and plays homebrew video games, and works at an awesome motion graphics company called Shilo (*www.shilodesign.com*).

Congratulations to, Dominika Juraszek (NY based alum of RISDI & Cal Arts), whose Boys Club NY Media Center students recently won The Best of Fest and the Best Special Effects Award for their animated film, "Planet Warriors 2". This story about youth super heroes screened at The Wingspan Arts Film Festival at Lincoln Center 's Walter Reade Theater this year. Clips from their film were showed on NY1 News. Dominika teaches animation, special effects, & film, at the BCNY media center, 287 East 10th Street , and is always interested in having guest speakers. The Media Center is having an annual youth film/gallery show/screening June 21st at 6pm. All are welcome as long as they RSVP. Dominika can be reached at *djuraszek@admin.bcny.org*

That concludes Tea Time for now. See you in September kids!

-Jose

WILL YOUR NEXT PROJECT SOUND AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS?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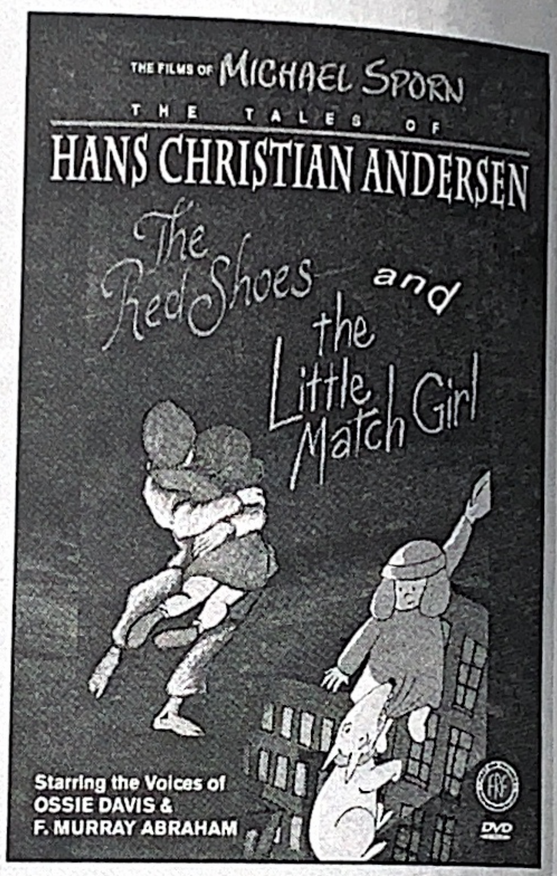
ATTICUS AUDIO ARTS

New York Happenings: Michael Sporn's Andersen Tales

On Wednesday, June 20th Michael Sporn will present his two newly released dvds to ASIFA East members. The programs on the discs includes four of Sporn's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen tales. The Red Shoes, The Little Match Girl, Nightingale, and The Emperor's New Clothes are the films included in the dvds as are lots of extras including documentaries on the making of the films.



At the ASIFA East meeting there will be a screening of clips and artwork

from the films as well as some some of the artists who were involved in the production. The idea will be to use the meeting to talk about animation production in the studio and the unothodox rendering techniques that were used in the production.

Wednesday, June 20th @ 7:00 P.M.
School of Visual Arts
5th Floor, Room 502
Admission is FREE

By Jake Friedman at AnimatorsUnite.com

Keeping Fresh the Old Spirit: An interview with JJ Sedelmaier

Witty animation with mature themes have inspired most of us [watch "Stoned Wheat" on Youtube.com] but much credit should probably be given to JJ Sedelmaier. Very few studios have a track record like JJ Sedelmaier Productions; upon entry of the studio, which currently houses six hired full-time staff, nearly a hundred awards grace the shelves. This is the studio that introduced us to SNL's "TV Funhouse" the first season of "Beavis and Butthead," the intro to "Strangers with Candy," countless memorable animated commercials, and most recently the Tek Jansen sequences on "The Colbert Report."

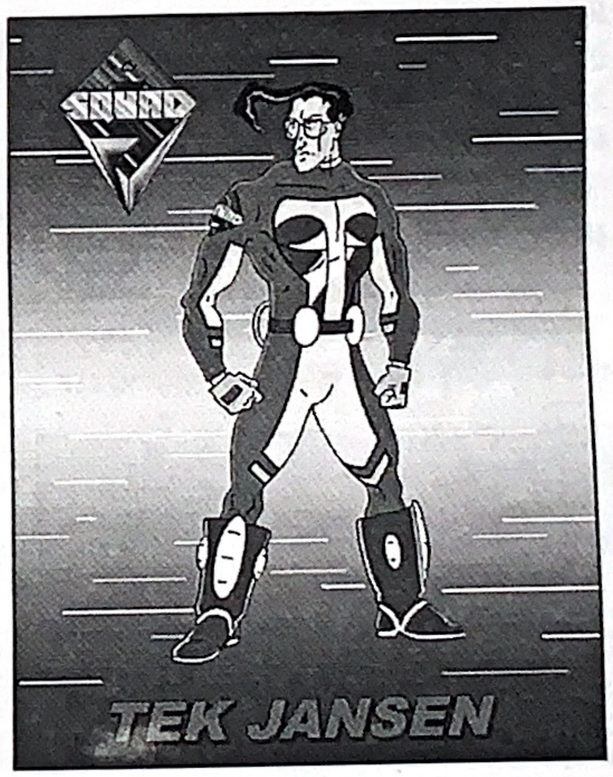
In an age of CG departments in 2D studios, or in which all the drawing done is on digital Wacom tablets and Syntique screens, Sedelmaier's studio, co-run by JJ and wife Patrice, stands out in the sea of time. It's a studio that encourages a creative vibe with hands-on art, using [ooh!] light discs and [ah!] pencils. I was recently graced with freelance animation work at the White Plains studio, where one of my first tasks there was cleanup and inking with pens on paper!

There's no question of Sedelmaier's strength in the New York animation community, but I wanted to uncover the secrets of the masked man, Sedelmaier himself.

JF: What's your sense of quality work that you strive for?

JJS: It's based on really thinking about why something is designed the way it is and trying to keep it as valid as I can. You can have something that feels conventional, but there should be something about it that sparkles. Sometimes it's a glorious, luscious style. Other times the style is very rudimentary, even crude, but there's still something charming or smart about it.

JF: Some studios develop a style as their calling card. Did you ever try that?



JJS: That's the last thing I would ever do. There's so much to animation. The craft is constantly wide open, and the more work that's done in different styles, the more that is evidence of how versatile the craft is. One of the reasons we're not doing Saturday Night Live anymore is because I got absolutely terrified of being typecast. I don't want to be thought of as the place that just does the SNL stuff. We had a body of work before we did the SNL stuff, and founded the studio on working with artists and illustrators who sometimes have never been animated. This translation of different graphic designs into film is very exciting.

Around the studio the shelves are filled with hundreds of books on various artists. One day JJ will be talking to artist, director, production manager Dan Madia about artist Alex Toth, another day he'll be talking to artist, director, production manager Dave Lovelace about Looney Tunes timing. There is no shortage of influence at the studio, and every book and magazine seems to have its purpose.

JF: You've noted your dad as an influence as a TV commercial director. What did he do?

JJS: He did the "Where's the Beef" spot, he did the federal express stuff, he literally changed the face of television advertising through his casting and his special humor sensibility which was rooted in the idea that entertainment sells. He was told that it couldn't. The impression some people had who had seen his work was that his commercials were very unusual looking, but they were only unusual in the sense that they were every-day looking. They appeared normal as opposed to plastic and polished. His stuff really isn't broad, it's understated. You can almost see influences of his work on films like "Raising Arizona" -- the camera angles, and the timing and so forth. In some respects my dad's stuff is almost like live-action cartoons. It's a great heritage.

JF: How did you wind up here?

JJS: I grew up reading comic books, watching cartoons, always drawing. In my family, it was pounded into me that I should do what I enjoy doing for a living as opposed to being in a situation where I would have to find time during the weekends. My mother's an artist and graphic designer, so there were always materials around the house. It was a great, inspiring way to grow up.

After I graduated from University of Wisconsin in 1979 I wanted to do comic books, and that brought me to New York. I worked in an antique shop for a while just to pay the rent. I was just showing my book to anyone who would look at it, and then meeting people like Tony Eastman who really helped me get started. Then I started working, meeting people like Jan Svochak, a brilliant animator.

I'm not good at doing stuff just out of my head. I can work off of something somebody said or wants, or something that somebody is having trouble solidifying and making into something. And that's why finding those people that you have a rapport with is very important.

Working with JJ, I see that strive for perfection daily. His notes on layouts and designs are very pointed and clear. He will give you complete freedom to design a figure, but his notes might be to slim down the waist, or to bend a grotesque smile inwards instead of outwards. It begins very laissez-faire, and ends with him knowing exactly how to turn your raw drawing into something special.

JF: So what job prepared you most for what you're doing now?

JJS: I worked at the Ink Tank from 1984 until 1990. Had I not worked there, I don't know that things would have gelled like they wonderfully did. When I got there, they wanted to hire me as an in-betweener, and I told Bob [Blechman] no, I want to be an assistant. An assistant does much more input. So I assisted for a couple weeks, and then they had some Children's Television Workshop stuff that I was able to animate. And then there were some revisions on a commercial that Tissa David had done that I made to modify when she wasn't available.

After a while I found myself doing most of the talking to the clients, and the studio decided I was going to be the producer, since I was talking about the work, and I was making people feel comfortable.

JF: How does one make clients feel comfortable?

JJS: By understanding what it is they're saying, what it is they want to hear, what it is you want to do, and then lifting the level of user-friendliness of the whole situation. I like letting them know that they're going to get not just what they need out of that situation, but also a little bit more. That little bit more is important, because that gives you the freedom to make it your own thing, within in their parameters.

It was JJ's wife Patrice that encouraged JJ to take the producing job, from which he was promoted to associate producer and then associate director. By the late 80's they knew they could open their own studio.

By the end I was producing and doing creative as well, and not everyone works as comfortably in one realm as the other. But it seems silly to me to not produce your own stuff. If you know what's involved in doing the job, it streamlines the process for everyone. What that does mean is that you can't take on a whole lot of work, but Patrice and I never wanted to take on a whole lot of work.

JF: What's it like to work with your wife?

JJS: It's terrific because it works. In some respects, what we do here is the same thing we do at home. We have different roles, she's always organized the household, and handled the money for the house, I've always handled the hands-on stuff in the house, and we wanted to be parents and have some control over our lives. If we were going to do that, we wanted to do it ourselves. I guess we're both control freaks, but I don't think unreasonably.

There are a lot of professional couples and families that make lots of money but have separate lives, and when they come home, I think the last thing either of them wants to do is bring their partner up to speed so they could engage in a complaining process. And then they shut down, and in the process you get further and further apart. But this, at various times, feels like an extension of our home life. But we set it up that way. We did this so we could do this together and be parents at the same time.

Read the rest of the interview, including JJ's stance on small studios and his biggest challenge, on AnimatorsUnite.com. Enjoy "Stoned Wheat" on Youtube.com.

Animagic Lays Off Entire Staff

On May 21st, Jeff Nodelman's animation studio Animagic laid off its entire staff, about 75 people, after 6 weeks of employment on "Nate the Great." Animagic is a subsidiary of Creative Group and Moe Green Entertainment.

"Nate the Great" was a show that PBS bought from Creative Group last year. Unlike most shows, which run for about 10 test episodes, "Nate" was picked up for a whopping 40 episodes that were going to syndication.

The staff was called into a meeting at 11am Monday morning and was told that the project was cancelled. Nodelman labeled it a hiatus and sent all the artists back to their desks to pack up, where they found the information on their computers inaccessible.

According to a source, PBS itself is shocked at the cancellation, which stems from the investors pulling out their funding.

INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

Name: Karen Disher
Years in the business: 13
Current profession: Story Artist, Blue Sky
Two weeks on a desert island- What do you bring?
My ipod and unlimited Bud Light. And the professor from "Gilligan's Island"- he could build me some useful crap out of coconuts and bamboo.
What programs do you watch on TV? The usual faves: "Lost," "24," "The Office," "30 Rock," "Sopranos," "Extras." I've been getting into "Ninja Warrior" lately too. And every now and then I watch, "Days Of Our Lives," for some good, stupid fun.
What philosophy guides your life?
I'm a big believer in Karma. The universe has a way of sorting itself out.
How would you define trust? It's about having someone's back. Knowing with absolute certainty that someone will do you right.
What advice would you give to an 18 year old?
Stay out of the sun! And moisturize!
Who do you think of as hero?
My parents, without a doubt. They sacrificed a lot and never complained.
What brand of jeans do you wear? Usually Levi's, but I sometimes splurge on Diesels- they can make anyone's butt look like a million bucks.
If you could meet anyone- Who would it be and why?
I'd love to meet Bill Clinton. Foxy!
What puzzles you? I am constantly amazed by the shitty things people do to each other, usually for the most petty and insignificant reasons. It's unreal.
Most amazing time of your life? My husband and I went to SE Asia last year, and it was absolutely incredible. I've been dying to go back ever since. Going to such a completely different part of the world for the first time just blew my mind.

David Levy

Weight For Me

At the start of my career in animation, I slowly began to gain 40 lbs, and no, it was not muscle gain. Well, now you know that I wasn't always the svelt Dave Levy you enjoy today. As a cautionary tale (just in time for the start of the swimsuit season!), I thought I'd share the following true story.

I was always a skinny child. In fact, my nickname on the playground was "skinny child." Kids had less imagination back then and it was reflected in the poor quality of the name calling. I was a kid who could eat almost anything at any time of day or night and not put on weight. This theory was put to a vigorous test when I worked at McDonalds during a three year period in my teens where I sometimes ate two McDonalds meals a day. You might say that I was the original Morgan Spurlock, but I didn't pack on the pounds.

By the end of my time at SVA my metabolism slowed down dramatically. Sure, now I had to buy 34 waist pants instead of 32, but I reasoned that I was still growing. At my first job in animation, a couple of my co-worker pals and I would eat pizza, McDonalds, or Wendys for lunch every day. But, the real road to weight gain began when I moved out on my own and took a job at Nickelodeon. Living alone for the first time, I reveled in my "now I can have cookies for breakfast," independence. Actually cookies might have been healthier than the bagels or bacon, egg, and cheese sandwiches I ate every morning. For lunch, it was still fast food, but now I followed it with a late afternoon snack from the office vending machine. Late at night, I'd follow up dinner with an cream sundae with all the trimmings. Next time I bought pants it was a size 36.

I kept up this rock star life (OK, a late period Elvis-rock star life) for about four years, until my pants became a 38. My problem first became clear to me when a co-worker friend shamed me into joining a gym. That was the slow start to reversing my weight gain. First thing to go was the unhealthy/high calorie breakfasts. Instead I bought a blender and became an expert smoothie maker. For lunch, it's now a reasonable deli sandwich with seltzer to drink. Dinner is sensible too and if I have desert it is often as small as one cookie or perhaps some pineapple. Currently, I go the gym 4 mornings a week and that, combined with much more sensible eating, has creating a good diet/lifestyle that I can easily maintain.

Animation artists are desk jockeys and we should assume that our sedentary lifestyles are not going to burn up a lot of calories. Making better choices in what I eat, combined with a regular schedule of exercise, have been the way I've created a healthier lifestyle for myself. Now if only someone will teach me how to dress.

David Levy

Looking back on this past season of ASIFA-East

Most of you long time ASIFA-East members know that we take the summer off. That means no newsletters, no screenings, no events, and no pants (because in the summer we wear shorts, silly!). Next year's screenings are already taking shape. There will be the perennial Open Screening, the return of the animation art auction, a special salute event to Code Name: Kids Next Door, and an evening of rare Christmas cartoons show on film! Much more will be planned and announced as the Fall comes near.

It's odd to be nostalgic for something as recent as this past ASIFA-East season, especially since it is mid May as I write this and we still have June events! But, I'd hate to miss this opportunity to remind everyone where their member dollars are spent. First off are the "thank you's." ASIFA-East couldn't accomplish anything without a stellar executive board. Special thanks to Toni Tysen (drawing class), Linda Beck (membership & communication), Candy Kugel (meeting space), Mark Bailey (newsletter editor in chief), Adrian Urquidez (web maestro), Michael Sporn (our mailing address), Paul Rosson (postal magnet), Ray Kosarin (international rep), Zoya Baker (treasurer extraordinaire), and Rich Gorey (for all the wine!). Other new faces have sprung up at the board meetings this year. New stalwarts include David McGuire, Kyle Boyd, and Art Sir. Could they be the new board members of tomorrow? Let's hope not. Just kidding.

September started off our event season with a bang, or should I say, with an appearance by Italian animation master Bruno Bozetto. Bruno was in town making a pit stop before being honored at Ottawa 2006. Our very own Candy Kugel handled the Q and A with Mr. Bozetto which was framed around a screening of his 1976 feature film, Allegro Non Troppo. In fact, Bozetto began a Fall season dominated by international programs such as, an evening with filmmaker Sayoko Kinoshita, and screenings of the British Animation Awards and the Best of Ottawa 2006.

Other highlights included a rare screening of Greg Ford's full length documentary on Friz Freleng, and a pitch-tastic evening with Cartoon Network's Heather Kenyon, at which ten rare CN pilots were screened.

Super Big thanks to all those who keep ASIFA-East running, and that includes all of you fabulous members out there! Now get out there and start working on that tan.

ASIFA East
c/o Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.
35 Bedford Street
NYC, NY 10014

Congratulations!

ASIFA East would like to offer our most sincere congratulations to all of our Festival Entries and Winners!!

Check out the results at www.asifaeast.com

Show your family & friends!!